

Interview with John Clemmons

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

JOHN CLEMMONS

Interviewed by: Henry E. Mattox

Initial interview date: July 1, 1992

Copyright 1998 ADST

Q: All right now, John Clemmons. John, you were a Security Officer with SY with the Department of State for some 30 years. Is that right?

CLEMMONS: 1956 to 1985.

Q: 1956 to 1985. Well first of all let's start with - I'd like to ask you to give me some personal background. Where you're from, where you went to school and a few things of that sort.

CLEMMONS: I was born and raised in Greensboro, N.C. Attended and graduated from Gilbert College in 1953. Shortly thereafter was drafted during the Korean conflict into the army and served 2 years as a non-commissioned officer in a military intelligence area. After I was discharged, I applied for what was then called SY with the Department of State. I was employed in August of '56.

Q: It was called SY. To my understanding, it was always called SY. Is it called something else now?

Library of Congress

CLEMMONS: It is called the Bureau of Diplomatic Security. It has Bureau status which they acquired about 4 years ago.

Q: How did you become interested in going with State?

CLEMMONS: Well, the main thing was that I became interested in investigations and security work as a result of my military experience. I started making applications to several Federal agencies just prior to my discharge from the Service, and State seemed to be the most interesting.

Q: So you went directly from military intelligence to the Department of State Security.

CLEMMONS: Actually it was about 8 months that I was returned to Arlington Industries where I was a cost accounting trainee waiting on my appointment with the State Department.

Q: When you reported into State and began your first assignment, what kind of work did you do?

CLEMMONS: After about 6 weeks in our headquarters operation in Washington, DC, They transferred me to San Francisco, Ca. where I worked in our field office, and initially just did routine background investigations. However, that was a very active office involving, at the time, several action cases that were filed by Chinese nationals against the Secretary of State claiming US citizenship and the Los Angeles and San Francisco field offices had the majority of these cases and we investigated each and every claim. Some of which resulted in prosecution in Federal Court. false statements and so forth.

Q: That's similar to the investigations that were carried on and, I suppose still are, in the Hong Kong Consulate General.

CLEMMONS: That's correct.

Library of Congress

Q: Now, on the assumption that our holdings in this Foreign Affairs Oral History program are not particularly heavy in the area of SY, I will insist on calling it SY, I'm going to ask you some detailed questions. You did background investigations. How, how were they initiated? What did you do?

CLEMMONS: Well, we'd get the assignment from Washington, from headquarters in Washington, DC, Main State, who, result of an application filed by an applicant, could be a Secretary or a communicator, ambassador or whatever and they would assign each field officer a certain responsibility. In other words, if they had lived in the California area, then it would be up to the San Francisco officer to do the northern California portion of that investigation. At that time we went back 15 years or to the person's 18th birthday whichever was the shorter period and would conduct a full field background investigation including a personal interview, a security interview of the applicant person.

Q: What is a full field background investigation?

CLEMMONS: It's a verification of all employment, verification of all college or university educational claims. I think at that time we were even going back to the high school and verifying high school diplomas, neighborhood investigations, police checks, credit reports, credit bureau checks, references, developed sources. That's a very comprehensive type of investigation.

Q: How often did you find misstatements of facts or fraud, or problem areas?

CLEMMONS: That would be difficult to determine. I would say, off hand, you're talking 25% of the time you would find either an omission or an inadvertent claim or even some of them would certainly falsify educational claims. Not list unfavorable employment activities, not list arrests, not list other activities which at that time would have precluded these applicants from being employed. I'd say about 25%

Library of Congress

Q: So 1 in 4 would develop something.

CLEMMONS: That's correct.

Q: That didn't jibe?

CLEMMONS: Exactly.

Q: What about the Chinese nationality things?

CLEMMONS: The Immigration Service, INS, the Immigration and Naturalization Service, had been trying to handle these cases for several years without much success. As a result, the Department of State, when the civil action started being filed against the Secretary of State by the Chinese who were over here in the United States, most of whom were in California, started filing civil actions, usually as a result of being turned down for application for a passport. Then once they filed a civil action, we'd open up an investigation and it was very interesting work because most Chinese males had their true family and their immigration family. The Chinese males would go back to China every 2 or 3 years and claim to have a wife back there and inevitably when they returned to the United States, they would make a claim of having one or more male sons born as a result of this union. We were successful in all but two that I know of, of the 751 Chinese civil action, partly as a result of the investigation that was going on over in Hong Kong and other areas in the Far East. Even though our immigration policies at the time might well have been discriminatory against the Chinese, it was still something that had to be resolved and most of the Chinese subjects we investigated were here illegally, had come in through some false immigration status.

Q: Most, over 50%?

CLEMMONS: Oh, yes, yes.

Library of Congress

Q: Well, how is it that it was discriminatory then?

CLEMMONS: Well, we excluded the Chinese according to our immigration policies at the time from admission to the United States.

Q: That's our quota. I thought you were talking about the procedure for investigation.

CLEMMONS: No, oh, no. That was directly according to. We dealt very closely with the United States attorney's office and the Chinese themselves hired private attorneys who were immigration specialists. A number of the cases ended up in court because of false statements that had been made or other activities that the Chinese did when they were, you know, filing against the - - - . Let me put it this way. When they were filing their civil action against the Secretary.

Q: You mentioned the figure 751 cases and you were successful in all but two. In what fashion were you successful?

CLEMMONS: We resolved the fact that they were not citizens. Therefore they were denied passports. Most of them had passport applications and they were denied passports.

Q: They were deported?

CLEMMONS: Deportation. That was difficult because these Chinese came from Mainland China and you had since 1949 Communist control. None that I know of were deported.

Q: It is a little late for me to do this but let me ask you to put on the record here why it is the Department of State needed its own security arm?

CLEMMONS: Most countries have a federal police force. For example the RCMP in Canada. The United States does not. It's divided. The criminal law enforcement at the Federal level is divided among various agencies. You've got the Secret Service, you've got the FBI, you've got, back then it was the Federal Bureau of Narcotics which later became

Library of Congress

the DEA, which later was taken over by FBI. So each agency pretty much handled its own responsibilities. The State Department has the obligation of issuing visas and passports. Any fraud devolves as a result of this activity, then it is up to SY to investigate. Prosecute if possible. The background investigations, again, each agency had pretty much their individual responsibilities of its personnel management permitted us to occur - - - as I recall could not keep up with the work load. They were the primary agency that would do the background checks but they were unable to keep up with the work load and as a result they permitted various agencies such as the State Department, to do their own background checks.

Q: How personalized were these background checks. If someone claimed that he had a Bachelor's Degree from San Francisco State University. Did you pick up the phone or did you go get in your car and drive off there?

CLEMMONS: Very little was done by phone. As we call it, everything was doorbell ringing. It was done by an individual agent at the location.

Q: Wasn't that terribly time consuming?

CLEMMONS: Maybe but it's still the most effective way to do it. If you are going to get the actual record. Often times, in fact, nowadays you cannot do hardly anything by telephone because the Release of Information form is required by educational institutions and most employers. So you have to go personally and say, "Hey, I'm John Clemmons, Special Agent from the State Department, and I'm investigating Joe Blow". The first thing that I ask is for the release of information form signed by the applicant and you either show it to him or have him make a copy of it.

Q: When I was awaiting appointment as an FSO many years ago, SY came around and talked to my neighbors in south Mississippi in a little town called Hattiesburg. They asked one of my next door neighbors whether or not I was a Communist. This was back in the

Library of Congress

50's, the mid-50's. And the neighbor said, "Young man, we don't have Communists in Mississippi". Did you ever find anybody who was alleged to be a Communist?

CLEMMONS: Well, a card carrying Communist, I would have to say no. But there were a number that were involved in, you know, front organizations and involved in activities that made you question. Of course, you have to think back in the 50's and early 60's we had the House on Un-American Activities Committee, which provided a list of those organizations that they felt were disloyal and we went pretty much by the list that was afforded by the HUAC. But to answer your question, I can't remember ever having some guy show me his Communist party order.

Q: No, but you still did find that maybe 1 out of 4 had made some mistake or something.

CLEMMONS: Oh, sure, sure. It was well worth it. Not only a mistake. Frequently in the Federal application process, the SY agent would be the first direct contact. Personal contact that was made between the applicant and the State Department. I mentioned earlier part of the background investigation is like a personal interview. That frequently would bring out information that might not be in the application. Evidence, although we were not psychiatrists or psychologists, like the evidence of emotional instability or personal hygiene or appear for the interview with the odor of alcohol on the breath. Any number of things.

Q: And that would show up in the report.

CLEMMONS: Oh, yes.

Q: Well, now you were in San Francisco for, what some few years?

CLEMMONS: Three and a half years.

Q: And then where?

Library of Congress

CLEMMONS: August '56 to December '59, we had the Cuban revolution. So they transferred me to Miami, to our Miami field office which meant that we dealt with the side of the office that was the agent in charge by itself. Then they sent me so we had two people there. Then we had the Cuban Affairs office which was sort of adjunct of what was our Embassy in Havana. We had a passport office there also. It was a very active office. There I didn't do any Chinese civil action investigation but there was, as a result of the exodus out of Cuba, there was a tremendous amount of passport violations and visa violations and we were involved in investigating. You know, I even had one subject develop a forged facsimile of a US visitor's visa. It was stamped in the Cuban passport to get him into the country. So it was quite an active office. It later became much larger than what it was when I was there. I did background checks every once in awhile.

Q: Background checks and Cuban visa.

CLEMMONS: Cuban visa and passports. Some that acquire passports fictitiously. So that was considerable amount of criminal investigations at the time. Although I must say SY was not that involved in criminal activity as it is now. There were certain offices seemed to be more involved in criminal investigations than others. And Miami is certainly one of those.

Q: You mean SY now is more involved in Miami?

CLEMMONS: Yes. I would say they have probably 10 agents right in Miami. With agents assigned to what we would call resident offices. And I think we have them in New Orleans and Atlanta. So they probably have 14 or 15 agents assigned to that office for the south eastern area.

Q: When you were assigned there, was the SY office attached to or connected with the Cuban Affairs office?

Library of Congress

CLEMMONS: No, we were totally separate. The Cuban Affairs office did end up across the hall from us in the thorough which was in the post office building. They were more or less directly across the hall from us. There was considerable amount of contact between the two of us.

Q: Who was the head of it then?

CLEMMONS: I gather the name of John Crimmins. C-R-I-M-M-I-N-S. He had control of it. As I said, it was in effect our Embassy that was in Havana, staffed with very few people but they performed whatever duties the Embassy performed - - -some of them.

Q: Your next assignment?

CLEMMONS: The next assignment was to Dallas, Texas. I was made a resident agent in a resident office and I reported to the Los Angeles field office. I was there from 1965 to 1970 and doing almost exclusively background checks covering northern Texas and all of Oklahoma. We were in the car out about every year. I should have added that throughout this period there was also responsibility for protection of foreign dignitaries that we had.

Q: In Miami also?

CLEMMONS: In Miami, San Francisco and until about...I'm trying to think. The State Department had the responsibility, I'm talking about SY, of the protection of heads of government, chiefs of state until, I would say about 1968. At which time we lost it to the Secret Service. We just did not have the resources. The Secret Service had and we probably had 200 agents worldwide, security officers, overseas and special agents State side. As a result, to try to protect someone at the level that they should be protected, we had to rely heavily on the local police department's to augment our resources. We had an incident in Chicago at about 1968 with the French Prime Minister that embarrassed... I think, someone spit in his face or something like that. As a result a decision was made to take the heads of state away from the State Department security and give it to the Secret

Library of Congress

Service who had been wanting it all along anyway. Let me take that back. That did not occur until 1970 that we lost heads of state. Because at that time I was in headquarters heading up a protective detail and I had a Secret Service travel with me to see how we handled it. They had been used to taking care of the President, Vice-president and they had very little experience in dealing with foreign nationals for protection because frequently the foreign nationals would bring their own security people in. They had their own decision. Do you let them carry guns... if you don't? We had a problem with Cubans, at any number of times. They're not supposed to bring weapons in and apparently they did. It created some serious problems. But it was in 1970 that we relinquished that responsibility but we still maintained the protection of any foreign national dignitary who was less than prime minister or head of state. For example, foreign minister still comes under SY's.

Q: Still today?

CLEMMONS: To this day, yes.

Q: Does SY have responsibility for guarding embassies in Washington?

CLEMMONS: Unfortunately, to a certain extent we do. Again we tried to utilize... or at the time when I retired, I was assistant director in charge of protection. We had, because of terrorism that was going on at the time, a number of ambassadors that were demanding some type of protection. Now if it was at their embassy, we could get the uniformed division of the Secret Service, hopefully, generally, on an ad hoc basis. If it was in New York at the UN, we could get the New York Police Department into it. In fact the Department was a line item in their budget in New York City. I'm going back 10 years. Of about 7 million dollars that the State Department gave the City of New York for the protection of the UN itself. Even the Secret Service didn't have resources to provide all that level of protection. The one Ambassador, I recall, that we had an actual protective detail on was... I want to say this slowly.

Library of Congress

Q: The Saudi Arabian?

CLEMMONS: Yes, Ambassador and we had to provide him with a small detail 3 or 4 agents but this was around the clock. So it mattered that a number of resources... So I don't know what they are doing now. But at the time when I retired about 1985 but we did have a detail for at least one foreign ambassador. We tried to avoid this as much as we could. We encouraged them to use private security forces.

Q: Or bring their own?

CLEMMONS: Well, to a certain extent but the weapons issue was never fully resolved to my satisfaction. You cannot condone a foreign national shooting an American citizen under any circumstances that I can think of. This is always a touchy issue of trying to make the foreign dignitary to understand that we have responsibility and we would take care of it. Other countries very much more stringent than we are, the Brits for example, the Canadians. When I was in Canada, there was a number of times when we had the President or Vice-president coming up. There was a constant battle between the Secret Service and the RCMP over the weapons issue. I tried to stay out of it because I was up there and had to work after the detail had come and gone. I would make the introduction between the Secret Service and the RCMP and let them fight it out. I did not get involved directly myself because it was a policy matter and I had to rely upon the RCMP for assistance with the Embassy and myself. So I could not afford to get on the wrong side of them. There are a number of incidents. I guess they are still going on.

Q: I'll come back to the Canadian experience in a minute. Were you ever involved even peripherally in terrorist attacks or assassination attempts?

CLEMMONS: No, not directly. We had several attempts made on our dignitaries. We had the Chinese. It must have been about 1971 or 1972. There was an attempt made, I think it was at the Waldorf. I wasn't on the detail. Some guy showing a handgun up above the

Library of Congress

heads of a crowd. I think it was some foreign minister. Whether it was Communist Chinese or the other ones and he was wrestled to the floor and taken away and arrested. And it seems to me like there were several other incidents.

Q: But it was not a great problem?

CLEMMONS: No, you know the US. I don't think we've had any serious terrorist incidents per se, not like a hijacking or even some bombings. You know, we haven't suffered the way some of the countries have like England, the IRA and France with the Middle Eastern factions, Germany with the Japanese Red Army and the Bader Meinhof people. So we've been fortunate in that regard, but the threat still exists. We had Khrushchev come over at about 1957, '58 when I was in San Francisco and we had many demonstrations against him along with other Russians that came in. I mean, you know, they got somewhat violent.

Q: Change the tension of attack a little bit. You were out in, sounds a little bit to me, like the Foreign Service within the United States. You were transferred from one place to another after a few years.

CLEMMONS: That's correct.

Q: How often did you get back to Washington as a junior officer and as a more senior officer?

CLEMMONS: It wasn't any regulated schedule. In fact I requested an assignment in Washington from Dallas in '69 because I realized I was developing a very narrow scope in the Department of State because I was out in the field all the time and really did not even fully understand SY because I was doing field type activities and there wasn't until 1970 that our Director visited the field office in Los Angeles that I requested an assignment. By then I had been out 14 years that I just had an occasional detail in Washington, but I didn't really have any real comprehension of the Department or the SY headquarters for that matter.

Library of Congress

Q: So you went to Washington in '70?

CLEMMONS: Uh huh.

Q: You stayed 4 years?

CLEMMONS: Stayed 4 years, about 6 months or 8 months in a protection area and for the rest of the time with our Special Assignments staff.

Q: What's that?

CLEMMONS: Well, you had at that time... (Can we go off the record for a second?).

Q: Yes, hold on a second.

Now we've just discussed whether we should be on the record or not with the definition or explanation of what SAS is, Special Assignments, and their duties were. Now if you'll proceed, please.

CLEMMONS: Special Assignments Staff, SAS, SY had two functions. One was the counter intelligence staff or office which dealt primarily with our employees and their activities in Communist controlled countries. In other words someone being reassigned back to Washington from a stand or tour of duty from Moscow would be debriefed. His or her activities would be going into great detail primarily to see whether or not this employee or any other employee had been subverted by the Soviets for whatever reason. The other half of the Special Assignments Staff office, to this day I don't know why, it was assigned the part of SAS, dealt with the sexual deviants or alleged sexual deviants in the Department and 95% of those were homosexuals. You've got to remember we're talking about the early 1970's where the climate towards homosexuals was quite different from what it might be today. Now I'm not making any explanations or justification for the Department's policy. We had very little control over it. It was more a personnel policy.

Library of Congress

At any rate my responsibility was to control the investigation or initiate the investigation worldwide and ultimately interrogate a subject or anyone who was accused for whatever reason of homosexual activity or other sexual misconduct. We did not go out or seek these people out because there was quite a lot of activity that came to our attention by various ways. To give you an example, one that stands in my mind. I had a metropolitan police officer from the police department of Washington, DC, call me one day wanting to telephone one of our Foreign Service officers. I think he was in Vienna. I said, "Well what's it for?" You know these telephone calls go out on radio waves and they can easily be picked up by foreign intelligence. He said, "We've had a series of homicides in Washington, DC area of homosexuals. We've just had one and there was a very incriminating letter from one of your employees in the deceased's personal effects." He says, "We think perhaps we might be able to give us a lead as to who might be committing these sexual psychopathic homicides of homosexuals. I said, "Well, we can do one better than that. We'll get the man brought back to the Department for consultation and you have first crack at him and when you get through, I'll talk to him. " As a result, the employee did admit his homosexual activities and was given the option of resigning or having charges filed against him by the Director General. That's the way we operated. In fact it was even a report, an annual report that I would submit in the three years that I performed this type of activity to the Congressman, Congressman Rooney who was in charge of the Department budget.

Q: I may recognize...

CLEMMONS: I had to submit a report on how many homosexuals that we had gotten out of the Department every year. Apparently a very important report because Rooney insisted on seeing that report before he made any decisions on the State Department budget. Now as far as our policy today, I couldn't tell you what it is. I know all background checks that we do. You look for certain indications of homosexual activity but we do not ask the question as we used to. Of course, literally.

Library of Congress

Q: The period you were talking about when you were directly involved is 20 years ago.

CLEMMONS: Yes, that is correct.

Q: Well, that's interesting but times change, bureaucratic regulations change and attitudes change at least to some extent.

CLEMMONS: True, true. I think there has been quite a lot in the paper recently about the military, particularly the navy being very much against knowingly having homosexuals in active duty. But it was...

Q: The navy is in trouble also on sexual harassment.

CLEMMONS: Yes, that's right. At any rate, it was a very difficult type of job where some of these interviews lasted three days. It was getting more and more difficult as time went on because employees that we were investigating were demanding rights of counsel there in the interrogation which we managed to avoid. A strange thing after I left that particular operation, that offices activities changed considerably and their homosexual aspect was no longer that terribly important.

Q: Let's take a break right here. I'm going to put this thing on pause for a moment. We're about reaching the end of a reel anyway. So we'll break and pick it up again in a few minutes.

CLEMMONS: That's the reason you don't see many people retiring anymore.

Q: Well, we'll go back on record now with the final phase of this.

You were in Canada in the Embassy in Ottawa 1974 to '78. What were the difference in duties or responsibilities or implementations, if any, between Ottawa and a field office?

Library of Congress

CLEMMONS: Well, they were totally different type job as a real security officer. For one thing, you operated pretty much on your own. In my case they had never had a security officer assigned to Canada prior to 1974. So I even had to devise my own filing system and so forth. But as a security officer in the Foreign Service, investigations take a back seat although you do have an investigative program. My particular situation, RCMP did the background checks because I wasn't allowed to do an investigation outside of the Chancery. You learned a lot about security. Some of which I never thought about. Door locks, for example, alarm systems. While you are not a police officer, but you still had to counsel, particularly junior officers and their associations and remind them of the non-fraternization policy. Sometimes our own agencies would try to violate that rule. It was up to the security officer to make sure that a junior officer did not get involved in something that he or she could not extricate themselves from.

Q: A personal relationship?

CLEMMONS: Yes, personal relationship. Procedural security at the time, we were hardening our offices all over the world because of terrorism problem. A number of our Consulates in Canada had been in place for 35 years and you try to do a security survey of an office with an attic access of a 12' height, what not. There was no way you could do it. So as a result I was instrumental in getting some of our Consulates modernized and placed in better offices than what they had because of the security problem. Travel was tremendous going at the time. We had seven Consulates General going from St. Johns, Newfoundland, which was later closed, all the way from Vancouver. Plus all the US Information Agency offices (USIS), attach# offices, Ambassador's residence, DCM residence. Tremendous amount of responsibility and you had to work closely with the host country police as a result.

Q: You had direct charge with the marines at the Embassy?

Library of Congress

CLEMMONS: That's correct and that's an experience within itself too because while you felt rather fatherly towards them and admired them, most of them were 18 and 19 years old. They could think of more ways to get into trouble than you could imagine. There were times. A lot depended on the gunny. If you had a strong NCOIC, that was helpful. Unfortunately, the first one that I encountered in Canada wasn't that strong because I found drains were littered with their girlfriends outside the marine house. He apparently lost control of the detachment so I had to come on as a heavy and make some requirements. It was a totally new experience. I think probably of the 30 years I spent with the Department, it was probably the most enlightening experience. I look back on my career and I look at those four years in Canada because so much went on up there and there was such a learning process on my part that it was and I regret not taking another tour. I, for certain reasons I was told that I could have Bonn, for example, if I wanted it. I turned it down. Again let's go off the record.

Q: *Okay.*

I'm going to stop this and turn the tape over and stop right here; pause again one second. The second segment, we resume with John Clemmons.

Q: *Now John, you said that you would have, under certain circumstances, gone on to another assignment in Bonn but you decided not to.*

CLEMMONS: This was a career decision I made. Probably more emotional than it was rational. Being, I think, biggest mistake was that I was four years in Canada and worked under two separate distinct Ambassadors. First of whom was the man I respected a great deal and he was very helpful. The second was totally different.

Q: *Excuse me one second. The first was Bill Porter, career Ambassador?*

CLEMMONS: Yes.

Library of Congress

Q: *The second?*

CLEMMONS: Should I name him?

Q: Yes.

CLEMMONS: Tom Enders.

Q: *Also a careerist, but go ahead.*

CLEMMONS: But totally different personality. Considerably younger than Porter, had teenage children, wife who, I guess the best way to describe them, as total disregard for anyone but themselves. For example, the resident staff were required sometimes to work 24 hours without a break. As a result, we had several of the older, these were third country nationals, most of them, have heart attacks, develop other illnesses as a result of the stress that was put upon them. They would hire without any clearance from my office and then when they found that they did not like this person, they would arbitrarily fire them. It was a constant battle up there. There was difficulty with the Ambassador recognizing SYB and his security apparatus, has a tendency to lean towards another Federal agency. And, you know, his wife would make unreasonable demands. Call... When the administrative counselor was out of town, I would frequently end up with the brunt of her anger or other resentments even though I had nothing to do with whatever she was complaining about. But she would call all hours of the night and then hang up.

Q: *So you had a personality conflict in those circumstances?*

CLEMMONS: Exactly, it really turned me sour as far as the Foreign Service goes. Looking back on it, it was the wrong reaction on my part. I should have taken another tour. I think it would have been a much more rewarding career had I, you know, gone back out. When I say Bonn, I was never actually offered Bonn. The rumor mill had it, so at that time it was our largest post. So I think I would have benefited, not necessarily grade wise because

Library of Congress

when I came back to the Department, I was made a special assistant to the Director who was a Deputy Assistant Secretary at the time. Then after a brief stint as chief of investigations, I was made Assistant Director for Protection and ran the entire protection program for four years until such time that I retired.

Q: Well there is a special fascination for many people anyway in the Foreign Service in serving abroad in staffing Embassies. It's different from working in Washington. You got a taste of it. You liked it. Would you like it perhaps better in retrospect than at the time?

CLEMMONS: Yes, I let personalities interfere with my judgement. I was told, I should not let the Ambassador, a certain Ambassador and his wife influence my decision but I did. I was burned out. I was frustrated. I felt particularly Mrs. Enders was cause for embarrassment to the American people. Certainly the Embassy as a result of her activities. They had no regard for anyone but themselves and this was shown through some of the activities of their children. They seemed to think they were above it all. So but had I to do it over again, I would definitely, for one thing, I would have tried to go into the Foreign Service sooner. When I came along there was no intermingling between the GS and the Foreign Service. If you were hired as a Special Agent, you stayed a Special Agent and you never crossed that line. Whereas now as soon as they unified, you come on as a Foreign Service grade and you will serve time in the field office, you will serve time overseas which, I think, makes for a much more professional organization. It's much more effective. Of course, we've got probably five times the number of people that we had when I started out too. Unless a person has a health problem or a personal problem of some type, a Security Officer or Special Agent, they will be assigned both State side and overseas.

Q: So you would then, I gather, recommend to a young person these days, coming along, you would recommend a Foreign Service career as something that they should look into as a positive possibility.

Library of Congress

CLEMMONS: If the person was inclined to be interested in political science and foreign affairs, I'm probably one of the biggest advocates of the Foreign Service as a career for a person who wants to go into public service. I think, without question, it's probably the most professional federal agency there is. Your serving at the dedication of the employees . And I, other than visiting various posts when I was traveling with the Secretary, I really wasn't assigned to a hardship post as such, but I understand that there is a distinct closeness that develops among the employees at a hardship post. Just the friends that we made in our little over four year tour in Canada, we still have any number of friends that we developed in the Foreign Service. Proportionally much greater than the rest of my time in the State Department. Yes, I thoroughly advocate the Foreign Service. I think it is a tremendous experience to be able to represent your country and work overseas and now it is much more, I think. The language training that they give everybody and area studies. You're much better prepared than you were say 25 years ago.

Q: You traveled with the Secretary whoever Secretary might have been at the time in your capacity as Assistant Chief of Protection.

CLEMMONS: Yes, As the Assistant Director in Charge of Protection, one of my responsibilities to supervise the Secretary's protective detail, which then comprised of about 35 Special Agents.

Q: SY agents?

CLEMMONS: Yes, SY agents and on about three occasions I traveled overseas just with the detail to observe their activity, professionalism whether or not they were performing and assisting where I could, you know, policy areas. But I was primarily, I think. I took two trips with Secretary Shultz...I can't... I think it was always Shultz.

Q: I'll have a story for you when we go off the record here. I won't clutter up this tape. John, your greatest accomplishment while with the Department of State?

Library of Congress

CLEMMONS: That's hard to say... If I had to narrow it down, I just don't know. I enjoyed it. I benefited. I think, the Department benefited. I can sit here all day and tell you little anecdotes and incidences and what not that occurred. I can't think of anything that stands out that is worthwhile to record as a special accomplishment other than the fact that I felt I had a successful career and we can retire with a good attitude towards any Federal agency and the State Department included, I think you've been fairly successful.

Q: Various professional disappointments?

CLEMMONS: I guess the last four years it was a constant battle with trying to get the resources to staff these protective details and the lack of cooperation with certain other Assistant Directors who had more or actual resources than I had, particularly those in charge of the field offices. There was a constant battle, a constant justification of a request for agents to provide protection of foreign dignitaries. For that matter when the Secretary was traveling overseas, they did not seem to comprehend that understaffed detail was not only unfair to the protectee, but also it was unfair to the agent. Somebody could very easily have gotten hurt. I guess that was one reason I decided to retire. I just got tired of fighting the battle of limited resources, and I'm talking about agent resources.

Q: Well, I probably should have reversed those questions so that we could end on a...

CLEMMONS: Positive note.

Q: But never mind, I enjoyed the talk and I think it will be useful.

Anything else you want to add that I did not think to ask?

CLEMMONS: I don't think so, Henry. I think that we're pretty well covered. I can't imagine anybody being particularly interested in my career.

Library of Congress

Q: Well, I think probably so. I think that very likely that this... You never know. In other words, you never know, because we're making these records for posterity not for me and you to look over again next week but later on.

Anyway, thank you very much. I think we'll bring it to a halt here.

CLEMMONS: Thank you.

End of interview